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BERLIN CRISIS AND LEGION: WHAT POSTS CAN DO!

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The United States and Soviet Russia are headed for a showdown over Berlin, probably in May. A serious situation is developing and the eventuality of war cannot be written off if the Communists are determined to violate American rights and to project their iron curtain further into Europe.

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It behooves all American Legion Posts therefore, to start thinking about their roles in national defense if war should come suddenly.

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By national convention mandates The American Legion already is committed to give all-out support to the Nation's non-military defense in case of any emergency.

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Suggestions for Posts

In keeping with their traditional patriotic leadership, American Legion Posts can immediately do these things:

1. Back up the President and promote national unity --
   a. Through press releases by their commanders.
   b. By sponsoring patriotic rallies to demonstrate community unity in the face of the Communist challenge.
2. Give active support to the non-military defense by --
   a. Setting up an active Post Civil Defense Committee if one is not already functioning.
   b. Confer with local civil defense authorities to ascertain how the post can organize to most effectively help in saving lives and property and preserving order in any emergency.
   c. Enter into The American Legion light rescue program.
   d. Get active in the blood donor program.

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National Commander Preston J. Moore summed up forcefully American Legion views on the Berlin crisis. His words can be adapted by every smart post commander for a timely local release to hometown papers and radio stations. The Moore statement which a post commander can use as his own follows:

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"Obviously the most immediate and important challenge facing The American Legion and all America is the Berlin crisis. We Legionnaires can forget about our 40 years of service and sacrifice if our country is not ready for a showdown that can come in the next 40 days and be finished in the following 40 hours.

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"This showdown must not result from a tragic miscalculation by Khruschchev and his Kremlin cronies. They must know in advance that disastrous defeat awaits them just as surely as it has been the fate of all dictators who challenged the unity and strength of the American people!"

Legion Rescue Squads

The American Legion has adopted a new national civil defense program of developing hundreds of light duty rescue squads to assist state and local governments in disaster or war emergencies. It has the endorsement of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization. OCDM state and local civil defense directors have been instructed to cooperate fully with Legion Posts. The program also has the approval of The American Red Cross, the National Association of State and Territorial Civil Defense Directors and the U.S. Civil Defense Council.

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Rescue, the field in which the Legion will serve under the jurisdiction of state or local governments, is one of the most important disaster and emergency services. Others are casualty care, emergency public health, emergency welfare services, debris clearance, fire protection and fallout decontamination.

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A manual on organizing rescue squads has been sent to the commanders of all 17,000 American Legion Posts. Each squad is to be made up of a squad leader, a deputy squad leader and six teams of four persons each. Rescue squads use a variety of tools. Their vehicles range from amphibious trailers to 4-wheel drive trucks capable of carrying a rescue team and its equipment over rough terrain and into remote areas. This equipment is depicted in the new National Emblem Sales catalog of The American Legion. The federal government will assist local communities in the purchase of vehicles and rescue tools. Under OCDM's contributions program, up to 50 per cent of the cost is available in the matching funds. Legion rescue teams will be trained by qualified instructors from the OCDM and also by Red Cross first aid experts.

Minneapolis Keeps Convention

The 41st national convention of The American Legion will be held in Minneapolis-St. Paul on August 24 to 27, 1959, as originally planned. National Commander Moore announced this decision on March 18th. Moore had been authorized by a 45 to 11 mail poll of the NEC to transfer the convention to some other city if housing problems in the Twin Cities could not be ironed out. A minimum of 4,500 first class hotel rooms is required for the convention. Only 4,112 rooms had been put under contract by mid-February. By mid-March, however, more than the required 4,500 minimum had been made available and the Twin Cities kept the conclave.

VALUE OF ORGANIZATION BIG LESSON OF REHAB CONFERENCE

The record-breaking 36th annual national rehabilitation conference of The American Legion in Washington, D.C., is over. Whatever news came out of it -- both good and bad -- served chiefly to put all veterans on notice of the value of organization. Plenty happened to convince the 800 delegates that the rehab road ahead would be rocky and filled with ambushes. Put into sharp focus was the need for bigger American Legion membership!

VA 125,000 Bed Ceiling

Administrator of Veteran Affairs Sumner G. Whittier revealed just before the 1959 rehab conference opened that the President had approved a revised authorized bed capacity for VA of 125,000. Such an authorized ceiling includes both beds in being and beds projected into the future. Legion asked for 125,000 operating beds. Concensus: Administration had done more whittling away at VA bed capacity in face of growing waiting lists everywhere.

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Whittier also advised National Commander Moore the White House had approved four basic VA policies having to do with acquisition of beds and hospitalization of veterans. Conference delegates viewed with suspicions the underlined sections of the new VA policy statement. The implications of the reservations are not cheering.

VA Basic Policies

Administrator Whittier in writing listed the new VA basic policies as follows:

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1. Continuance of complete, high quality hospital care for all veterans in need of such care for service-connected disabilities.

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2. Continuance within the capacity of the 125,000 authorized beds in VA Hospitals, of the care of war veterans with non-service-connected disabilities, recognizing that basic responsibility lies with other governmental jurisdictions for providing hospital care for all citizens who are unable to defray the expense of hospitalization.

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3. Shifting of beds or hospitals from one type of use to another by the Administrator as may be permitted by law and advances in medical treatment.

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4. With the approval of the President and subject to the availability of funds, construction to provide beds or to compensate for major geographic shifts in veteran population, all within the overall total of 125,000 authorized beds.

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Vet Benefits in 1958

Elaborate VA display board, electrically-lighted, outside of rehab conference hall, portrayed impressively all benefits received by veterans in 1958. Many smart service officers saw American Legion membership ammunition in display, stood around with papers and pencils, copying facts.

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VA Board showed during 1958 it guaranteed 148,000 home, farm and business loans for veterans; it provided hospitalization for 619,000 veterans and out-patient care to another 178,000; it has 920,000 vets in colleges, schools or on the job or on the farm training; it paid compensation and pension benefits to 2,900,000 veterans and to 1,200,000 dependents of deceased veterans; it approved 462 purchases of automobiles for disabled veterans; it authorized 360 grants for special housing for seriously-disabled vets; it had 6,400,000 government life insurance policies in force with total face value of $43,240,000,000. What VA Board didn't say but all service officers knew, was that all these benefits were the products of devoted American Legion legislative efforts over the years.

VA Licking TB

Dr. William S. Middleton, chief medical director of the VA, had just been reappointed for another 4-year term when he appeared before the rehab conference. He made a dramatic report of the progress of VA medicine and research in the treatment of tuberculosis. The load of TB cases in VA Hospitals has dropped from 16,194 in 1954 to 10,250 in 1958, a 37-1/2% reduction, he said, saving his department some $107,000,000 in unexpended funds during that 4-year period. He stated VA is now authorized to shift unneeded TB beds to the care of other types of maladies. Dr. Middleton told the delegates the VA accomplishment in fighting TB was "a boon to all mankind!"

Review of Claims

VA announced during rehab conference it would review the disallowed claims for service-connected compensation or pensions for a group of 284,000 veterans of World War II and of the Korean War. This represented a first rate victory for the Legion on behalf of these veterans. These 284,000 cases were those of veterans who while still in the military service were hospitalized or treated and their definite disabilities diagnosed. Yet these conditions were not noted when these veterans underwent their final physical examinations for discharge from the service. The VA disallowed these claims on the grounds of "disability not shown at time of last examination." Legion claimed VA should not have depended on inadequate military medical records, should have examined every claimant itself to determine if his disability or any residual of the claimed disability was in evidence.

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The review of these disallowed 284,000 cases will start in near future at the VA Regional Offices in Honolulu, Hawaii, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and Lubbock, Texas. All 67 VA Regional Offices will not get to these reviews of these disallowed cases until mid-1961. VA estimated only 2,000 veterans might be found eligible for monetary awards as result of the review of the 284,000 cases. Legion pointed to its own independent survey of 300 such cases in Pennsylvania in which it found reversible errors in 50 per cent of the adjudications.

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Legion began prodding VA to also review disallowed claims after the agency started reviewing all current compensation and pension payments. Legion hopes VA may eventually get around to reviewing disallowed claims of 2,514,000 other veterans who had no hospitalization or treatment while still in service for their claimed disabilities.

Legion Presents Program

National Commander Moore presented The American Legion's 1959 legislative program before the House Committee on Veteran Affairs at a public hearing on Capitol Hill on March 3. The Old House Caucus Room was jammed with not even standing room left. Of the 23 members of the House Committee 19 attended. For 45 minutes Commander Moore spelled out the Legion objectives in one of the finest such presentations ever made.

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He emphasized four priority areas of 1959 Legion legislative goals: (1) liberalization of disability and death pensions in line with current cost of living and changed conditions; (2) equallizing death benefits of World War II and Korean War widows and orphans with those of World War I; and (4) the maintenance of an adequate hospital program with top quality medical care for sick and disabled veterans.

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In its pension program, Moore said, the Legion asked for modest cost-of-living increases in monthly payments as set forth in H.R. 2742 and H.R. 4741; it asked for slightly higher income limitations as contained in H.R. 2874; and it urged automatic presumption of unemployability at age of 65 for pension purposes as provided in H.R. 3750. He reviewed dwindling purchasing power of dollar and pointed out cost of veteran benefits still hovering around 1% of national income, virtually unchanged since 1890 despite four wars since then. Bill to equalize pension eligibility for widows and orphans of the three modern wars is H.R. 4536.

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Perhaps significantly, for first time in years, House panel failed to question the national commander and the national rehabilitation chairman. No questions relating to field of vet affairs were directed at Commander Moore or Chairman Robert M. McCurdy.

Legion Dates to Remember!

April 20	National High School Oratorical Finals, Lodi, Cal.
April 29 - May 1	National Executive Committee, Indianapolis, Ind.
May 9	American Legion Founders Day, St. Louis, Mo.
July 17-24	Boys Nation, Washington, D.C.
August 24-27	41st National Convention, Minneapolis-St. Paul
Sept. 6-10	American Legion Junior Baseball national finals, Hastings, Neb.
November 11	American Legion Veterans Day exercises at Arlington National Cemetery.

Information Wanted

If you have a post publication, that information is needed for a new Directory of Legion pubs being prepared by Jack R. C. Cann, Sec'y., A.L.P.A., 6116 E. Washington St., Indianapolis 19, Ind. Send him NOW the name of your paper; name, number and address of post (or other sponsor); name and address of editor.

Teague Drops Hints

Some hints of what was coming in administration legislation on vet pensions in near future were dropped before rehab conference by Olin E. Teague of Texas, chairman of the House Veteran Affairs Committee and Administrator Whittier when they appeared before delegates.

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Teague said findings of his own survey had convinced him that of 383,767 vets now on pension rolls, 20% did not belong there, another 30% was fairly well off and the great group at bottom was in desperate need. He said he was close to producing a bill that "won't please everybody" but would help vets in real need. He spoke also of a new "slide rule" for determining need.

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Legion experts saw in all this the unveiling of a new yardstick for determining pension eligibility based on net worth and total family income. What such new measure would do in adding to and in removing veterans off the pension rolls was anybody's guess. What it would do to the Legion pension objectives needed nobody's guessing.

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Administrator Whittier called it a "sliding scale pension plan based on income." He said it would mean higher pensions for some veterans, said nothing about how many would be lopped off present rolls.

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With no specifics to work on, Legion at close of rehab conference was marking time. Commander Moore at the annual banquet put it this way: "Potentially the most significant and far-reaching veteran legislative proposals to be introduced in the past decade have been readied for submission to the Congress. We deeply regret the specifics of these proposals were not available for the consideration of this conference ... The structure of veteran benefits has been promised a major face lifting. Whether this remodelling will improve its basic value to veterans and the nation or merely make it more attractive to the balanced budget brigade remains to be seen. But under no circumstances must the foundation -- the basic principles -- be touched! Obviously the Legion is not going to be neutral about these measures. We're going to study them carefully, discuss them fully and then take a stand ... Let me make one thing clear at this point -- whatever our position with respect to any proposal -- it will be based on principles -- not on personalities or politics. We will be dealing with issues! Never with individuals!"

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Child Welfare Reports

All American Legion Posts, Auxiliary Units, Forty and Eight Voitures and Eight and Forty Salons are urged now to start preparing their reports on 1958-59 child welfare activities and expenditures. This request comes from the National Child Welfare Division of The American Legion. Posts and units will receive their appropriate child welfare report forms in the near future from their respective chairmen or department headquarters. If all facts are assembled before-hand, there will be no delays in filling in and returning the report form according to accompanying instructions.

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NATIONAL NEWSLETTER
For Additional Information On All Programs Write To National Public Relations Division
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Best Publicized Birthday!

Every Legionnaire and every post can be proud of the recognition given The American Legion during its 40th anniversary week of March 15 to 21. It was the most widely observed and best-publicized birth anniversary any organization ever had.

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King Legion really rode the TV air waves during the birthday week! A total of 159 TV stations ran the new Legion film "We Who Serve!" This included one or more showings in 99 of the nation's top 100 markets.

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Almost 300 TV stations made use of special American Legion transparency slides which announced the anniversary.

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In addition to the nationwide use of the Legion's own movie, another tremendous salute came on March 15 in the one-hour long NBC spectacular "Frances Langford Presents." The entire show was dedicated to the Legion's 40th anniversary. National Commander Moore appeared in person on this TV program and presented Miss Langford with a special Legion Trophy in recognition of her marathon USO tours during World War II and the Korean War which earned her the title of "GI Sweetheart."

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American Legion salutes also were paid on other TV and radio net work and local shows and news programs.

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The thousands of American Legion post birthday parties literally produced miles of newspaper copy. Hundreds of favorable birthday editorials were published.

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Nearly 1,400 cooperative ads in 3 and 5-column matrix sizes were distributed to newspapers from coast to coast. Another 5,000 cartoon-type feature mats were sent to daily and weekly newspapers outlining Legion accomplishments of the past 40 years.

Historians Have Jobs

This is the year of a national post history contest which closes in the fall of 1959.

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Has your post ever compiled its dramatic history? Have you a post historian? Now is the time to look into this!

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National Historian Emily J. P. Herbert has announced the details of the 1959 post history contest. The rules are set forth in her outline for a post history which can be obtained from National Librarian Thomas V. Hull, The American Legion, P. O. Box 1055, Indianapolis 6, Ind.

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Nat'l. Librarian Hull has a reminder for all posts. A very appropriate way to honor a deceased post member is to place a book in his memory in the Verna B. Grimm Memorial Book Collection of the National American Legion Library in Indianapolis. Posts can either send a book or a check for the purchase of some volume. A letter should accompany such a contribution giving the donor's name and the name of the Legionnaire or Auxiliary member in whose name the book is donated. A handsome book plate, suitably inscribed, is attached to each gift volume.

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Has your hometown a history of its founding and growth? Here is a worthy community service project for any post, emphasizes Nat'l. Librarian Hull. It is a project that can be spearheaded by the post historian.

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He suggests that a committee be appointed headed by the post historian and that the cooperation of all local citizens be solicited. This committee should issue a call for old photographs, ancient press clippings, old letters and set up interviews with old settlers. School children can be enrolled in the effort to help dig up this material from family closets, attics and basements. This is a project that can lend itself well to exciting local newspaper and picture publicity.

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Make a family vacation out of your trip to the 41st National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul, August 24-27. You can get help in planning your trip by writing State of Minnesota Tourist Bureau, State Office Building, St. Paul 1, Minn.